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ABSTRACT

The Funds for Excellence program at Thomas Nelson Community College (TNCC) offers teachers the opportunity to take time off to enter or re-enter business and industry to update their skills and knowledge; to update and enhance occupational/technical curricula and courses; and to improve communication between area business and the college. Recognizing the need for a more effective means of vocational faculty upgrading than sabbatical leaves, TNCC applied for and received a grant for 1983-84 under the Virginia State Council of Higher Education's "Funds for Excellence Program." The initial year of the project had as its goal to select faculty members and place them from half- to full-time in governmental, business or industrial worksites for an academic quarter. Nine faculty members, representing the disciplines of architecture, accounting, commercial art, drafting, electronic servicing, and food service, were selected and participated during the initial year. Evaluations completed by participating faculty, their division chair, and the participating business/industry indicated that the business/industry representatives felt that their firms had benefited from the program; that faculty members felt their skills had been upgraded; that courses in several departments were updated with new knowledge and new equipment; and that important links were made between participating faculty and personnel at their internship sites. During the second year of the program, efforts are being undertaken to expand interest in the program within the college and business community. (LAL)

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FUNDS FOR EXCELLENCE
A COLLEGE FACULTY/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP THAT WORKS

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FUNDS FOR EXCELLENCE: A COLLEGE FACULTY/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP THAT WORKS

Picture if you will, faculty members taking time off from a semester or quarter term to enter or re-enter business and industry for the purpose of updating their skills and knowledge, to update and enhance occupational/technical curricula and courses, and finally to improve better communication between area businesses/industries and the college. Such a program has been in existence for two years at Thomas Nelson Community College, located on the Virginia peninsula in Hampton.

How The Program Was Developed

Community colleges continually strive to find the best ways to encourage and assist faculty members in their quest to keep abreast of changes, modifications, or innovations in their teaching field. This problem is especially acute in technical and scientific fields where rapid changes in methodology mandate concomitant changes in classroom and laboratory activities to assure that students are fully qualified upon graduation.

Thomas Nelson Community College, like most community colleges in the nation, has always encouraged faculty to participate in such traditional faculty development activities as further academic study, readings, attending workshops, seminars and professional conferences. As important and rewarding as these activities are, few people would dispute the fact these activities can hardly replace a "hands on experience."

In its search to somehow provide a "hands on experience" which would permit more in-depth study, the college began to seek a method to allow a faculty member this opportunity outside its normal sabbatical leave program. Sabbatical leave programs, with or without pay, may provide similar opportunities; however, sabbaticals are not without shortcomings. Usually, faculty members must have been at an institution for periods of 5-7 years and in many instances must be tenured. Second, many faculty cannot afford to take an extensive period of leave, with or without pay (sabbaticals with pay are at a reduced rate), due to the financial drain. Some faculty on unpaid sabbatical leave spend a year in a paid technical/scientific organization and find they are unable to resist the new range of privileges brought about by increased incomes and elect to remain in industry - to academia's loss. Finally, the number of faculty eligible for a sabbatical seldom equates to the number of sabbaticals awarded because of department/college policies and/or fiscal limitations.

Recognizing not only the growing magnitude of the problem facing faculty members as their technical and experiential knowledge and skills eroded, but also that college technical curricula similarly faced the potential of becoming stagnant, Thomas Nelson Community College decided

one solution would be to arrange for the faculty member to be placed in governmental, business, or industrial work sites for an academic quarter (10 weeks). To this end, the college applied for and was awarded a grant for the 1983-84 year under the Virginia State Council of Higher Education "Funds for Excellence Program." The funds received allowed the college to hire replacements for those faculty members selected to participate in this unique academic/industry partnership. The initial grant was renewed successfully for the 1984-85 year because the first year was so effective.

Operation Of The Program

The college formed a Funds for Excellence Committee, consisting of three administrators, three faculty members, and one business executive, for the purpose of providing coordination. This committee administered and monitored all aspects of the program. The initial year of operation (1983-84) had as its goal the selection of participating faculty members to work from one-half to full time for a full quarter. The initial year was divided into the following phases.

Phase 1

Information regarding the program was disseminated throughout the college. Applications for participation from faculty were received, evaluated, and prioritized. Finally, businesses and industries with the technical, scientific or occupational skills needed were identified, briefed on program activities and goals, and invited to join the college in this venture. As organizations agreed to participate, faculty applicants were matched with an appropriate industrial "partner." Workshops were prepared, scheduled, and conducted for the participating faculty and industrial partners. At this time the mutual goals and responsibilities were enumerated and agreed to.

Phase 2

During this phase, known as the implementation phase, faculty assignments were consumated by the committee following coordination with the faculty member's division chairperson and approval by the Dean of Instruction. Regular visits were scheduled to each faculty member on-site by the responsible division chairperson and the TNCC Funds for Excellence Committee Chairman. Discussion took place at this time concerning progress toward initial goals which the faculty member had identified for the experience to produce. In most cases, faculty members were treated as fully participating employees of the organization. The participating industries were quite enthused with the partnership exchange as comments which follow indicate. Additionally, the faculty members came back to the college excited and full of ideas to improve their courses and curricula.

Nine faculty members were selected and participated during the initial year. Their discipline areas included architecture, accounting, commercial art, drafting, electronic servicing, and food service. The results of the first year far exceeded the expectations of all involved. Business and industry representatives who expected to give

more than they received, in many instances, found the reverse to be true.

Evaluation Of The Program

Evaluation instruments were completed by each of the participants as well as their division chairperson. Additionally, an evaluation was completed by each participating business or industry. Finally, the TNCC Funds for Excellence Committee, individually and collectively, evaluated the results of the year's activity.

Examples of remarks taken from agency evaluations of the program were as follows:

> "We obtained benefit from the intern's visit and worked along with her achieving her goals."
>
> "We only wish he could remain with us to help reduce our workload."
>
> "If anyone else in your department would like to work in our office for the same type of exposure, please notify us."
>
> "We believe that the faculty internship program is mutually advantageous and would be willing to discuss our participation in future follow-on endeavors."

Not only did each participating agency ask to be considered for further participation but one even stated, at an open meeting, that because the benefits to business and industry were so significant, they should be willing to contribute financially to assure program continuation.

The benefits to the college may best be evaluated by comparing the goals with the results.

Goal 1: To update the skills and knowledge of the faculty participants.

Results: Each of the faculty participants was extremely well pleased with the degree to which this goal was achieved. Indications of their satisfaction are comments extracted from faculty evaluations.

"The internship provided me with excellent exposure to ways in which CAD (computer assisted design) is being used in industry, and also gave me an opportunity to "rub shoulders" with some very experienced designers who shared opinions about what to do with CAD in the classroom."

"I believe this is one of the best programs we have of this nature at TNCC. It is well run and a great concept. Congratulations to all of you who made it so."

"This internship was very successful in fulfilling my goals."

"The most helpful part of this internship was the flexibility that I was allowed. I could rearrange my schedule as the circumstances arose to observe or take part in special activities that occurred."

"The experience gained will be particularly valuable in the preparation of the new computer-augmented accounting course to be offered in the Spring 84 quarter."

Goal 2: To update the technical curricula and/or courses.

Results:

- In the architecture department the following two courses were updated and/or revised: "Building Codes, Contract Documents and Professional Office Practice," and "Materials & Methods of Construction."

- A faculty member from the accounting department prepared a new computer augmented accounting course which was offered in the Spring 84 Quarter.

- The drafting department ordered new computer assisted design (CAD) hardware and software, based on knowledge gained during internship, to improve and update the curriculum.

- The food service faculty participant prepared a new course in menu planning emphasizing the use of menu engineering to maximize profits through the menu.

- In the electronic servicing department, a new test equipment repair calibration course was prepared and scheduled for late 1984.

Goal 3: To improve the communication between the peninsula business/industrial community and the college by means of this program.

Results: All participating faculty members established solid working relationships with personnel in the agency to which they were assigned. Communication between participating agencies and the college, following the internship, have not just continued but have improved. As a result of the first year's experience, five additional members of the business/industrial community have agree to serve on the Funds for Excellence Committee for the second year.

The final question facing Thomas Nelson was "where to go from here?" As a result of the success of the first year, the Virginia State Council of Higher Education awarded the college an additional Funds for Excellence grant for the 1985-86 academic year. During this year every effort is being made not just to sustain interest in the program by the business/industrial community but to expand that interest. Five new businesses or industrial leaders have been added to the committee to oversee and administer the program. Additionally, faculty from such academic areas as English, marketing and management are being placed in

industry. Further, a concerted effort is planned for a series of workshops to inform the peninsula community of the program, its purpose and goal, its past success, and benefits to all.

Program Duplication

The future offers even greater opportunities for expansion of this cooperative effort for community colleges. Although the cost of replacing a faculty member while away from the classroom is negligible when compared to the benefits, the college may be subject to criticism if it continues to unilaterally fund the program. Two alternatives are worthy of consideration:

1) the receiving agency and the college share equally in the cost of replacing the absented faculty member, or

2) the receiving agency replace the absented faculty member with one of its qualified professionals.

If the college and the business/industrial community continue their present commitment to the Funds for Excellence program, then not only its continuation, but also its expansion is assured. It is indeed most appropriate under these conditions, that the college and the business/industrial communities share equally in the financial obligations since they share equally in the benefits.

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